

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 6 Elul 5785,  
corresponding to August 30, 2025.

# TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 820 Hz) (p. 1078 S) (p. 728 Hi) (p. 1024 AS)

SHOFTIM שפטים

Deuteronomy 16:18

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED)]

1. This Parshah features Halachahs about the national leaders: judges and police (16:18...), the king (17:4...), Levitical priests (18:1...), and the prophet (18:15...). These leaders comprise different branches of the government, which we, as Americans, are quite familiar with. The three branches of the American government serve as checks and balances to balance the political spectrum. Similarly the Torah branches of government also serve as checks and balances, making sure that no one person can have so much authority. The Torah gives us the rules of a Torah society, but realizes that it will not alter the human character. We will still have jealousy, hatred, power struggles, and the like which will always permeate any society. I am always amazed that in the days of the Mashiach, there will be an increase of the Cities of Refuge, from six to nine. Even in the days of Mashiach there will be accidental killings. (RED)

2. The Talmud points out in several places that the section dealing with judges is immediately followed by the Torah dealing with idol worship of the Asheirah, a beautiful tree. There doesn't seem to be a connection between the two, but several modern commentators discuss it. Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (my Rebbe's grandfather) points out that the Asheirah must have been a very beautiful tree, the landscaping of which was used to attract worshippers. Similarly a judge was a handsome man, physically outstanding among his peers. But just as a tree can attract people and mislead them, so too can a judge mislead people along the wrong path. [RED's note: I think of Asheirah when I see the Baha'i Temple and its magnificent gardens in Haifa and elsewhere in the world. It is the Asheirah influence that helped create such beauty!]

3. One of the laws of the king is a bit bizarre. The king had to have two Torah scrolls in his possession. One was stored in his palace. The other one was a small version that he wore on his arm. The second one is the one I refer to as bizarre. I view this Torah law as an attempt to keep the king in line with the Torah's teachings. Out of the whole list of kings in Jewish history, how many were really Torah observant? No need to answer this one, but it can't be a good answer. Sometimes the confrontation between the king and the Sanhedrin was too strong as in the days of King Yannai (around the year 100 BCE). The Talmud (Sanhedrin

19a-b) describes King Yannai's intransigence when confronted by Shimon ben Shetach, a leader of Jewry and brother-in-law of the king. The sad description of the king rendered by the prophet Samuel was quite realistic as he saw the difficult periods of Jewish history that laid ahead of us in the future.

4. The Torah prohibits a king to have excessive wealth, too many horses, and too many wives. All excessive items will sway the king away from Hashem. Rashi places the highest number of wives at 18, which was the number of wives that King David had. King Shlomo exceeded that number by a great deal. He must have thought that his wisdom would protect him, but it didn't. According to a Midrash, Hashem punished Shlomo by taking away his wisdom that Hashem had granted him early in his career. These two were the two best and most revered kings in our history. Yet they possessed flaws. Amazing that Scripture makes no attempt to whitewash these great men. Flawed as they were, they still managed to be honored and respected. (RED)

5. We are required to listen and obey to what our Sages tell us. (17:11). This is part of our faith belief in Hashem and His representatives in our world. If they tell us that it is dangerous to mix fish and meat, we are required to obey, even if we do not comprehend the law as they have stated it to us. All of us have to trust someone else who has the expertise that we do not have. I trusted the surgeon who operated on my knee(s) because he knows what I do not know. This is just one case of hundreds that we place our trust in another human being. This is required of us in physical matters, and in spiritual matters as well. We place our trust in our rebbe because he knows what we don't. And rabbis have their rebbe as well. It is the way our world works.

6. "You shall be wholehearted with Hashem..." (18:13). We do not seek soothsayers to know the future. We trust Hashem; our belief in Him is sincere and wholehearted. There are people who are a sham in real life even though they pose as sincere religious people. Our belief is tested when we cannot tell when we are deceived. This is what belief and trust in Hashem is a test in our lives. At times we struggle in life to choose the right path. That is when we say that everything is in Hashem's hands (except for the fear of Hashem). Here, in this passage, the Torah tells us to have faith. Trust in Hashem. This is our ultimate goal. To have faith in Hashem because it makes the most sense in life.

7. Before every sports competition, the coach or manager gives his players a pep talk to raise their spirits and morale so that they will perform to the best of their ability and beyond. Similar to this do we see that the Kohen Mashuach Milchamah, the Kohen appointed to lead the Jewish troops into battle, addresses all the

soldiers to raise their confidence and spirits so that victory is within reach. In this case this Kohen is likened to the religious chaplain in our day. He is assigned to encourage the soldiers to believe in Hashem and be victorious. This is a definite case of developing a positive attitude, which we believe will generate positive results. A real belief in Hashem will result in a real belief in himself. It will bring out the best in himself. He is entering a difficult time in his life, and he will need to be the best he can be. [I believe this continues to be true when Jewish soldiers go into Gaza. They need to be the best possible. May Hashem bless and protect them.]

8. Midrash. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 20b) states that the Jewish people had to do three things when they entered the Promised Land: to appoint a king. To eliminate Amalek. And to build a Holy Temple. Two of the worst incidents recorded in the Book of Judges are the graven image of Micah and the terrible incident of the concubine at Givah (chapters 17, 18, and 19-21) came about because there was no king in Israel.

#### QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT SHOFTIM 5785

##### I. From the Text

1. What is the punishment for one who serves idols? (17:5)
2. In regard to which 3 things is the king prohibited? (17:16,17)
3. Which animal parts of a sacrifice are given to the Kohen? (18:3)
4. Before Bnei Yisrael went out to battle, who would speak to the army? (20:2)
5. What kind of tree must you preserve when Bnei Yisrael are setting siege against an enemy city? (20:19)

##### II. From Rashi

6. What's the difference between a Shofet (judge) and a Shoter (officer)? (16:18)
7. How many wives may a king have? And which king had that many wives? (17:17)
8. How many Torah scrolls must a king have? (17:18)
9. What was written on road signs directing people to the Cities of Refuge? (19:3)
10. After the procedure of the Eglah Arufah (killing an animal, a ritual after finding a murdered person), if the murderer is found, what happens to him? (21:9)

##### III. From the Rabbis

11. Why did the Torah limit the king's ability to own horses and have wives? (Talmud)
12. When is a Zekein Mamrei who is found guilty executed?
13. When was the procedure of the Eglah Arufah discontinued? (Sotah 47a)

#### IV. Midrash

14. If ONE witness came to court and testifies that you owe Reuven \$100, what happens?

#### V. Haftarah

15. What comfort do we receive when we are persecuted in Exile?

#### VI. Relationships

- a) Tzilah - Lemech
- b) Noach - Mitzrayim
- c) Misha'el - Eltzafan
- d) Yitro - Eliezer
- e) Betzalel - Miriam

#### ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT SHOFTIM 5785

1. Sekilah, stoning.
2. Excessive amount of horses, wives, and wealth.
3. Shoulder, 2 cheeks, and stomach.
4. The mashuach milchamah, a specified Kohen.
5. A fruit bearing tree.
6. Shofet, judge makes laws. Shoter, officer, disciplines the people to accept the laws.
7. 18. King David had 18 wives.
8. Two. One in his treasury, and one on his person.
9. Miklat, Miklat (City of Refuge)
10. He is executed.
11. Too many horses would lead the people back to Egypt. Too many wives would lead him astray.
12. On Chol HaMoed.
13. Before the destruction of the second Holy Temple, when murders happened more frequently, and the identity of the murderer was already suspected.
14. You can swear that you don't owe the money. If you do not swear, then you have to pay.
15. The knowledge that Hashem is close at hand and the Mashiach might come tomorrow.
16.
  - a) Husband-Wife
  - b) Grandfather Noach
  - c) Brothers
  - d) Grandfather Yitro
  - e) Great Grandmother

**Torah Dialogue Sponsor: Beth & Gary Hopen**  
 in loving commemoration of the yahrzeits of her parents, Kalman Talansky z"l (Kalman ben HaRav Dovid), and Irene Talansky z"l (Chaya bas Moshe). May their neshamas have the highest of aliyahs